

## GUIDELINES ON REFERRAL TO THE COUNSELLING SERVICE

For some students being at University can prove to be a very challenging and stressful experience. The range of support services provided throughout the university is significant in assisting students to cope effectively and successfully in achieving academic success and maintaining personal well-being. However, there are times when specialist intervention is required in order to address specific issues. In such instances a referral to the Counselling Service may be appropriate. The following guidelines may be helpful in making that assessment.

### WHEN TO REFER: SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

The reasons why a student's situation may warrant referral to the Counselling Service are varied and diverse. A range of issues or events may prompt such action. A student may directly seek your advice or it may come about as a result of your own observations or concern from others. The following signs and symptoms may act as guide as to when you might consider referring a student to speak with a counsellor:

1. When you become concerned about *academic issues* such as:
  - Inconsistent work
  - Procrastination
  - Poor attendance or performance
  - Repeated requests for extensions or special consideration
  - Inability to engage constructively in group or class activities.
  
2. When you are conscious of marked *behavioural changes* in a student such as:
  - Changes in mood or behaviour
  - Tearfulness or intense emotional expression
  - Obvious lack of emotion
  - High levels of irritability or violent outbursts
  - Notable changes in grooming or personal hygiene
  - Dramatic weight gain or loss
  - Signs of excessive alcohol or drug use
  - Falling asleep in class.
  
3. When you become aware of marked changes in *interpersonal interactions* such as:
  - Increased dependency on your support or others
  - Social withdrawal or isolation
  - Absenteeism
  - Complaints from peers regarding the student's behavior
  - Unexpected changes in personal relationships.
  
4. When you become concerned for the *student's safety* due to:
  - Expressed feelings of persecution
  - Expressed feelings of hopelessness
  - References to suicide or self-destructive behaviour
  - Threats of violence or aggression towards others.

5. When you become conscious of *your boundaries* in relation to a student's issues. This may include times when:

- You feel the student is becoming too dependent on your support
- You feel you are covering the same ground over and over to no avail
- You are unsure of what to do or how to respond
- You feel out of your depth
- The situation is depleting you of your own emotional resources
- Your suggestions are constantly rejected
- Your professional boundary is compromised.

In most instances a cluster of signs and symptoms often present and it is important not to ignore them or think someone else might be dealing with the situation.

### **RESPONDING TO THE STUDENT**

When a student presents with a particular concern that is best dealt with by another service or professional please note the following guidelines:

- Talk to the student in private
- Gather the facts of the presenting issue without probing for too much personal information
- Affirm the student for confiding in you and re-assure him/her that help is available
- Inquire how the student is currently attempting to handle the problem
- If a student is very upset ask if there is anyone you can contact on their behalf (service / friend / family)
- If and when a referral to the Counselling Service is necessary express this recommendation clearly to the student
- Validate the suggestion by indicating the specific behaviours or concerns that the student has presented with or outlined to you
- You may wish to point out that the issues presented go beyond the boundaries or competency of your professional role. However, it may be helpful to explain what type of support you can offer
- In the event of a student agreeing to attend for counselling clarify any proposed follow-up either by yourself or your Department. This reassures the student of your interest and can provide a more comprehensive management of the situation
- There are times when a student may refuse to attend the Counseling Service. This decision must be respected. A student may need more time to consider counselling as an option. However, providing information on the Service can help dispel some of the myths and misconceptions that prevail
- In the event of such a refusal it is important not to become a substitute for the professional help needed
- Document all your interactions with the student for further reference
- If unsure about any details please contact the Service and check these in the presence of the student
- The Counselling Service guide on [Frequently Asked Questions](#) may answer any queries that a student has prior to making an appointment with the Service.

## **MAKING A REFERRAL**

On making a referral to the Counselling Service it is helpful to:

- Discuss the referral with the student
- Provide accurate information on how to access the Service. Copies of the Counselling Service Information Leaflet are available on request
- Encourage the student to make the appointment themselves. This ensures a degree of personal responsibility and motivation on their part.
- There are times when assisting a student to connect with the Service is helpful – i.e making a phone call from your office
- Reassure the student that the Counselling Service is a confidential, professional service
- Referral at this stage is for assessment purposes only and not a commitment to therapy
- To make a referral simply ring **01-7083554** and indicate to Receptionist that you wish to make a referral / appointment
- Give the student's full name and some brief details pertaining to the situation
- In the event of an emergency or a crisis it is important to state this on contacting the Counselling Service
- Do not assume that a highly distressed or vulnerable student will actually follow through on promising you they will attend
- In such instances it is important that you provide an escort for the student to the Counselling Service.

## **RESPONDING TO INDIRECT REQUESTS FOR HELP**

On occasion a student may indirectly ask for help and support pertaining to a personal issue. This may be communicated to you via email or in a written class assignment rather than face-to-face. If such communications include any reference to emotional, physical, or sexual abuse, depression, anxiety, thoughts of suicide or death it is vitally important not to ignore such communications or delay in making contact with the student.

- Check the ITS system or Departmental records for a contact number for the student
- Invite the student to come and speak with you as soon as possible
- Enquire as to their whereabouts and who is with them
- Prioritise your appointment with them
- If unsure about meeting with the student on your own seek assistance from a colleague
- Contact the Counselling Service prior to the appointment for advice if needed
- Feel free to secure an emergency appointment with the Service if you feel this might be helpful
- Such appointments can be cancelled if not required
- If a student is linked in with professional services on Campus it may be important to let such services know of your interactions with the student, the reasons how this came about and the outcome of your meeting.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The Counselling Service operates under a strict code and policy of confidentiality. Once a student has been referred to the Counselling Service we are bound by confidentiality not to discuss or divulge any details pertaining to the referral without written permission by the student. We generally suggest that if referred to the Service by a third party it might be helpful for the student to let the referrer know they have attended the appointment.

In exceptional circumstances some limits to confidentiality prevail. This generally relates to situations where there is risk to oneself or another individual or issues around the protection of children. If confidentiality cannot be held for any professional reason the counsellor will explain the limits to confidentiality and discuss the necessary procedures and intended actions that may need to be taken. Please see our Confidentially Policy.

## **CONSULTATIONS**

If in any doubt about how to respond or proceed with a difficult issue or concern please feel free to consult with a member of the counselling team. This can be done over the phone or by appointment. Seeking clarification is important in effectively managing and addressing the many student issues that present. Such consultations are also appropriate if you wish to debrief following an interaction with a distressed student or difficult situation. All consultations are dealt with in strict confidence and are open to staff members, students and significant others.

## **COUNSELLING SERVICE DETAILS & OPENING HOURS**

<b>LOCATION:</b>	<b>TOP FLOOR, STUDENT SERVICES CENTRE, NORTH CAMPUS.</b>
<b>OPENING HOURS:</b>	<b>Monday – Friday (All year)</b> <b>9.00 a.m. - 5.00 p.m. (Fri 4.45 p.m.)</b> <b>Closed for Lunch 1.00-2.00 p.m.</b>
<b>DROP-IN SERVICE</b>	<b>DAILY FROM 2.00 – 3.00 P.M.</b> <b>OFFERED ON FIRST COME - FIRST SERVED BASIS</b>
<b>INFORMATION &amp; APPOINTMENTS</b>	<b>CONTACT SERVICE ON 01-7083554 OR</b> <b>CALL TO RECEPTION DURING OFFICE HOURS</b>
<b>AFTER HOURS</b>	<b>IN CASE OF <b>EMERGENCY</b> PLEASE CONTACT:</b> <b>MEDICAL SERVICES: 01-6296911 FOR ON CALL DOCTOR</b> <b>AMBULANCE SERVICE: 112 / 999</b> <b>CAMPUS SECURITY: 01- 7086929      AVAILABLE 24/7</b>